

Project Ashes

by ElementsOfSapphire

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Summary: Awake and obsessed with her search for her old DCI, Alex Drake had all but alienated her daughter. But when all is revealed, Molly and Alex put their heads together for their 'Project Ashes'. Was the 80's just a world Alex had created? Will they find the elusive Mr Hunt? Or will the search have been simply in vain? [Galex eventually- Set post series 2, but pre-series 3]

1. Alex's Obsession

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A/N: Hello everyone! Thank you for taking the time out to read my latest attempt at reviving possibly THE greatest show of all time :D As written in the description, please bare in mind that this is set AFTER series two, but before the angst that was series 3. Gene's bullet may have taken Alex from 1982, but it delivered her back to 2008.

Hope you enjoy! :)

* * *

><p>~Project Ashes~

* * *

><p>Molly Drake sat, as she did every evening after school, with her headphones firmly over her ears, and her homework to hand. She hadn't

always spent her evenings in this way; she could remember a time when homework would be scribbled in the car on the way to school, having spent the entire evening baking cakes or mocking celebrities with her mum. The evenings when she'd be stuck as a twig in mud over her maths work, and her mum would sit all night with her, working through the sums; teaching her, helping her, loving her.

Of course, Molly was glad her mum was home and alive. The nights spent worrying whether her best friend in life would pull through, would hug her again, swam all too fresh in her mind. But she had been naive to think that life would simply return to how it used to be, how she wanted it to be.

She knew her mum was trying to cope; she could see it in her false smile, or her over-starched uniform, or the petty cash she kept finding in her school bag. She was trying to be the mum Molly deserved, but she was a woman obsessed, possessed, and she couldn't shake it away.

At first, Molly put it down to missing work, or a need to keep on top of the flow, but her mum had always known when enough was enough, and would humbly switch off the laptop and head off to make the pair a hot-chocolates in time for whatever series they were addicted to at the time.

This was different, however. The past two weeks she hadn't left her laptop alone, punching the keys rapidly, only pausing now and then to scroll through whatever it was she had pulled up onto the screen. Her mum wasn't due back to work for another month, and Molly was dreading the occasion. At this rate, she knew it wouldn't be long until she lost her best friend entirely, until the only person she could turn to in life would be Evan. It was hard, so extremely hard, to watch the person she loved more than any in the world as they slowly crumbled to dust before her very eyes, as they became almost unrecognisable against their former self.

And that was why, as her mum sank down into her evening bath, that Molly Drake tiptoed into her bedroom, snatched the laptop and with undeterred fortitude, hit the _history _button.

She didn't know what it was going to take, what she was going to find, but the 12 year old new one thing with certainty. She would do whatever it would take to help her mother.

She would do whatever it took to make Alex Drake rise from the ashes.

* * *

><p>Chapter One

It was nine o'clock when Molly heard the faint knock against her bedroom door. Lowering her book, she shifted up in her bed and scrubbed at her eyes wearily.

"Mum?"

Tentatively the door opened, and Alex Drake entered holding a mug of steaming cocoa. She placed it softly besides her daughter, reaching out a spare hand to stroke the tresses of her golden hair. Her eyes

bore her guilt, her expression bearing self-hatred as her gaze poured over her child's wanting face, and Molly's heart burnt for her. Something was consuming her very soul, and she knew that if she could share it with her, could let her in, then maybe " just maybe- they'd be able to work through whatever it was that was slowly dragging her mother away from her.

"Did I wake you, sweetheart?"

Molly stifled a yawn, nodding down towards the book resting in her lap.

"Just thought I'd read a bit more of that before bed. It's starting to get good."

"What's it about?"

Molly picked up the aforementioned novel, lamely flicking through the pages as Alex perched softly on the edge of her bed. In the lamp light, Molly noted with sadness, her mother almost appeared more deathly than she had done in hospital.

"The pain of keeping secrets," Molly replied casually, and did not miss the wince in Alex's expression, "And how sharing them with those you trust might just help."

"I might borrow it when you've finished, like we used to?"

She was trying to be causal; trying to avoid the obvious connotations to her daughter's statement, but Molly was undeterred. She let the silence fill the moment, let her mother think about what things did used to be like, and only spoke as the eyes avoiding her own began to glaze with tears.

"Who's Gene Hunt, mum?"

At his name, Alex's eyes rose and burnt. The passion for life that Molly hadn't see in her mother for weeks sparked momentarily, before twinkling away like a breath in the wind. Stone cold shutters replaced her short-lived openness, but Molly felt an inch of hope; a chink in her mother's armour had finally been taken.

"Who?"

Molly snorted, shuffling over slightly to allow her mum to sit beside her on the bed. Alex remained seated where she was; distrust seemed to become her.

"That's a bizarre question to be asking, considering your search history."

Finally Alex's eyes slowly peeled up to meet those of her child's. It was the first time in her entire life that Molly had ever felt genuinely frightened of her mother. She'd been abrupt, firm, disciplinary to her before, but the anger she saw building in the once-familiar hazel eyes left her feeling on-edge.

"You went on my laptop?!"

Molly suppressed a whimper.

"I wanted to know what's been wrong, mum. You've been acti-

"Just because you're my daughter it gives you no right to go snooping at my private stuff, young lady! What on earth made you think that you had any right to do that! What made you think for one second that-

Alex's arm flailed up at her rebuke, her expression dangerous as her arms flung from her body. As she yelled, she saw in slow motion her arms failing to judge the distance, and rather than striking the air, her hand collided unceremoniously with her little girl's chin. The anger dissipated instantaneously, replaced with sheer horror.

"Oh, shit! Mols, I'm sorry. Mols, oh God, what have I done?"

Soft fingers rubbed against Molly's chin as the tears she'd attempted so hard to suppress began to flood down the girl's face. She shuffled forward, her hands reaching out to pull her daughter into a hug, and becoming mortified as she watched the younger girl instinctively flinch away. "I'm so sorry, sweetheart. I'm so, so sorry."

Alex shuffled over further, taking the spot that Molly had offered her earlier, and enveloping her girl in a hug. It was rigid to begin, and Alex began to fear that this was it; that she had finally cut the trust she'd been unintentionally hacking away at for weeks. But with a finally sob, she felt Molly relax into her chest, felt a fist bunch up her nightie and an arm tighten around her.

She held her daughter like the precious jewel she was, like she used to hold her, like she should have been holding her.

"You wouldn't believe me even if I did tell you," she whispered finally, and a little head rose from her chest, a blurred but curious gaze meeting her own.

"Why don't you try? It helps to share- you taught me that, remember?"

Molly sat back, letting her mum wipe the remaining tears from her eyes with the soft pad of her thumb as she thought. She hoped that she'd let her in, that she'd let her help.

Alex sighed, then opened her mouth to speak. "When I was in my coma I met him."

"He was a doctor?" Molly queried, frowning a little.

"No, darling, a copper- and a big bastard one at that."

Alex smiled fondly, and Molly noted the sincerity of the emotion.

"I am. This just sounds crazy, Mols."

"Please try, mum." The young girl urged, and as she began soothingly rubbing her mother's arms, she could feel her hopes rising. She could see, in her peripheral vision, her mother composing herself, and awaited the truth to finally be revealed to her.

"I went back to the 80's. At least, I thought I did. He was my DCI-part of the team I was on. There was him, Shaz, Chris, Ray-

"Like from Sam's file?" Molly asked, recognising the names from those weeks ago when she'd been snooping at the files in the back of her mother's car. That fateful day felt like a lifetime ago, and at the same time, only yesterday.

"The exact ones, just, a different era". I suppose." Alex replied and briefly sucked on her bottom lip as memories began to rack through her brain. "Anyway, I was there almost two years, Mols. I know it wasn't that long here, but it was for me."

"What happened?"

No longer able to keep Molly's gaze, Alex dropped her eyes to watch as her thumbs swept past each other; nervously she twisted them around and around.

"I couldn't stand him to begin, but over time I learnt to accept his little ways, his bullish, arrogant behavior, and well, we became". closer."

Molly Drake allowed herself to smirk.

"You were shagging, you mean?"

Alex snorted her shocked amusement; "Molly!" she rebuked, her eyes almost shining as she lifted them to meet her daughter's once more. "No, no, we never did anything like that."

Her contented smile slowly began to fade once more, and her curiosity returned to her revolving thumbs. Molly watched as a sort of pain-agony, she assumed- filled her mother's face, and a tooth pulled at the lip below.

"I don't think he ever knew how I felt before I left." At Molly's confused glance, Alex found it appropriate to expand. "He shot me. An accident."

Molly whistled. "Pretty big accident, mum."

"He was a pretty big guy." Her mother retorted almost fondly. "It just- it felt so _real_".

At her mother's admission, finally Molly thought she understood. Finally she thought that she could begin to help the tortured soul.

"You want to see if you really made it up at all, don't you?"

Alex nodded in response and Molly breathed deeply, preparing herself for the question she knew she had to ask, but that she thought she already knew the answer to.

"You loved him, didn't you, mum?"

A second's silence filled the room.

"Yes. Yes I think I did."

Alex shook her head. That hadn't sounded right.

"_Do._" She corrected, and finally Molly understood.

* * *

><p>Somewhere across the city, a lone candle burnt. Its flickering tresses caught and flecked across a worn name place, a bitten nail slowly tracing the tip of the cool metal. As the finger pulled away, the candle was blown out, and a rumbling sigh echoed around the bright red walls.<p>

* * *

><p>AN**:

 So there's the first chapter! I'm sorry for the distinct lack of all things Gene/ Galex, but a certain gruff copper *DOES* turn up in the next chapter, and Galex is *CERTAINLY* to come. (I'm too much devoted to that Galex fluff to let it go missing from one of my stories xD)

Please review if you can, as I will be extremely grateful!

Cheers :)

2. Making Plans

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A/N: Hey! I'm hoping you're currently here because you enjoyed chapter one, and I'd like to send many 'thank yous' for doing so :D As my first _Ashes to Ashes _story (that's longer than a 'one-shot'), I'm surprised by the lack of Gene- but I plan to make up for that in the chapters to come! Thank you for the reviews so far :)

Enjoy! :D

* * *

><p>~Project Ashes~

* * *

><p>Chapter Two

Alex picked her daughter up from school the following day. Walking out the gates with Karrie, Molly was surprised to see her mother's car parked across the road, and the driver holding two coffees tightly in their grasp.

"I reckon your talk must have helped her a bit, Pud, she hasn't picked you up in weeks."

Molly nodded, a smile sneaking across her face. She had been discussing her mother's conversation from the previous night with Karrie throughout PE; they'd been best friends since aged 4, and even her mother was beginning to think of her as Molly's long-lost sister. She hadn't told her everything, deciding that was for her mother to disclose, but had offered her the main concept of the discussion and promising to tell her more if Alex said she could.

"It's definitely a start." Molly agreed as the pair began to cross the road.

"_Project Ashes_" Karrie smirked back. She spoke through air-quotes, presumably referencing part of their earlier discussion. "You gonna tell her what you found today?"

"She's probably got this far already." Molly sighed as they stopped at the other side of the zebra crossing and she drew her friend into a hug, which Karrie reciprocated warmly. Molly's mum's distancing had been affecting her friend more than she liked; she had become so uncharacteristically reserved lately. But a glimpse of her old spark had definitely returned today, and she'd be lying if she said it hadn't made her happy, too.

"Ciao, Pud." Karrie called, and sprinted off as the school bus pulled in some yards away from them, waving as she ran.

Molly walked towards her mother's car, parked on a strip of double-yellows, her schoolbag swinging loosely in her grasp. Despite being outside school, and despite it being seen as 'uncool', Molly threw herself into the hug her mother offered her, letting her bag fall to the floor beside them.

"Mum!"

"Hello Sweetheart." Alex greeted, and then turned her attention to the coffees perched on the roof of the car.

Molly took the cup she was offered, sniffing it carefully and being pleasantly pleased by the consequent aroma. "Chai latte?" she chanced.

"With vanilla syrup." Alex concluded.

Swooping up her own mug " finished as she had waited for her daughter- Alex tossed it into the bin beside them and jogged around the vehicle, lowering herself in with an elegant swoop. "Come on, get in."

"What's the rush?" Molly queried once she had sat down and belted up. She took a sip from her coffee as the engine turned over, but noted that her mother had shown no intentions of actually pulling away. A hand left the steering wheel and prized one of her own from the coffee cup, a thumb softly gliding across her clammy palm.

"I've been a shit mother to you lately, Mols. I've been ratty, distracted, possessed." Alex sniffed, closing her eyes in a moment of sincere regret. But as quick as the emotion had consumed her, it left again, and she tugged affectionately on her daughter's hand, effectively dismissing the sombre mood. "So tonight it's just me, and

you. Cinema, dinner, crazy golf, whatever you fancy." She grinned and let go of her daughter's hand. Instead, she let her own move to her child's face and rubbed the slightly-pink spot she had hit the night before. Guilt racked her once again, and she lent gently forward to kiss the sore spot. "I love you, Molly. I love you so much."

"I love you, too, mum." Molly assured her, pulling her into an awkward, brief hug.

"So where are we off to?" Alex asked, suddenly sitting back and hitting the steering wheel assertively. She watched as Molly deliberated with herself, scrunching up her face as she thought.

"Home." Came the final response.

"Home?"

Molly grinned, leaning forward to fiddle with the car radio and smirking at the confused expression encompassing her mother's face in her peripheral vision.

"For a date with an Ice cream tub, chocolate, duvet, laptop, pen and folder." She smiled. _"Project Ashes"._

Alex looked at her daughter, lost.

"It's what Karrie's calling it."

Her mother's expression hadn't changed.

"Said I wanted to 'revive' you, you know? Bring you back from the ashes. So we'll investigate 'subject Hunt', together."

Understanding fled across Alex's face, followed by a deep adoration for the girl before her. How had she managed to become so obsessed with her private investigation? How on earth had she cut out the beautiful girl from her life? After fighting for so long to return, she'd let her daughter down, and quite severely at that.

But not anymore. Today was the beginning of their new life together; today was the day when Mummy bear was returning to the cabin to make the porridge and care for baby bear once again.

Mummy bear.

Holding back the sudden wash of tears, and swapping them for a smile, Alex hit the indicator and swerved back out onto the road, only remembering after fifty yards that Gene's style of driving still wasn't acceptable, and hastily reducing her speed.

"Let's make it two tubs." She grinned, "And a disgusting amount of rocky road."

* * *

><p>The man watched the car leave, merely inches before he'd reached the damn vehicle. His intention had been simple; to stride over, give them hell about parking on double yellows and drag their posh arse back to the station. But only a few metres away he'd changed his

mind. He could see the driver in the rear-view mirror, and had only just held back his sharp intake of breath as realisation dawned in. He'd sped up, hoping to reach them before they pulled off, but then the indicator had lit up, and the car had zoomed into the distance.<p>

Surely it wouldn't have beenâ€|. Couldn't have beenâ€|

Not driving like thatâ€|.

He shook the nancy feelings of hope from his head and began to stroll back in the direction he'd come.

* * *

><p>"So, what have you got so far?" Alex inquired, sipping from her oversized mug of cocoa before balancing it precariously on the sofa's arm rest.<p>

Molly retrieved her notepad from her lap, it having been nestled on the duvet as they'd eaten their way through the first tub of ice cream. They'd opted against the main light, instead lighting the room with a cluster of candles on the coffee table before them. With the soft lighting, snuggly duvet and her mother's arm around her shoulder, Molly could almost pretend that the awful events of the summer had never occurred.

"Nothing you don't have yet, mum," Molly began, flicking through the pages, "Just that Fenchurch East still exists, there's a bistro where you said you used to live- but it's not called _Luigi's_, and there was once a car registered to _that_ number plate."

Alex's eyes doubled; she hadn't even thought to trace the car!

"You mean, it did exist?"

"I don't know," Molly admitted, absentmindedly chewing the tip of her pen, "it's listed as being SORN. So we don't know for sure _what_ sort of car it is, just that there was one, and that it's still about somewhere".

"Well that's definitely a start," Alex smiled, a new found optimism trickling down her spine as she reached for her laptop. "I don't have much else, if I'm honest."

"A DI having spent weeks searching and you have nothing." Molly tutted. "What sort of copper do you think you are?"

Alex smirked to her daughter, "a time-travelling one, apparently."

"Anyway," Molly prompted, jabbing her ice cream-smothered spoon in the direction of the laptop, "what else have you got?"

Alex appeared to be skim reading, flicking through page after page of saved material and hastily-typed notes.

"DCI Hunt _was_ a DCI for Fenchurch East. I tried to find photos to prove that it wasn't my subconscious constructing beings from case notes from my training days or something, but the bastard never took

any. Absolutely all the news clippings just list his name."

"And none mention you?"

"There's this, but that's it."

Alex twisted the laptop slightly for Molly to read, taking the distraction as a prime opportunity to steal a sizeable spoonful of her daughter's ice cream. She had brought up a picture, presumably from a library archive, of a burnt newspaper article. Only the first quarter had been seen, and it took mere moments for Molly to read it.

"â€|_DI Drake was the first to arrive at the scene of the crimeâ€|_" she read aloud, before thinking softly, "Could be anyoneâ€|."

Molly felt her mother deflate beside her; perhaps the size of the issue was beginning to dawn on her. Determined not to let her mother slip back into her attitude of the past few weeks, Molly sat up abruptly, grabbing her pen and pad to hand once more.

"So where should we start tomorrow?" she inquired eagerly, and Alex could but smile at her daughter's enthusiasm.

"I want to look into _Luigi's_. If I can prove that exists, then I'll know I can't have made it all up." She admitted, and watched with a smirk as Molly jotted it down, matter-of-factly- into the notepad in her grasp.

"Then I'll look into the car. Karrie's dad still goes to that Classic Car club so he must know _someone_ who knows something about tracing our SORN car."

"Sounds like a plan, Mols." Alex replied, proudly hugging her child tighter. She had no idea how she'd managed to live those two years without her beautiful little girl, and wondered briefly whether the elusive Gene Hunt had anything to do with it.

"Well shift up, mum, we've got some browsing to be doingâ€|." She heard Molly announce, and shaking _away_ her reverie, the pair set about _realising_ them instead.

* * *

><p>Somewhere across the city, a man was turning in for the night. It wasn't even eleven yet, an early night in the grand scheme of his life's entirety, but the eve's spent awake and merry with a bottle of crap house wine were long gone.<p>

He pulled the red satin sheets over his tired form, begging for sleep to claim him before the dreams began. The sheets were worn, old, but he couldn't bring himself to change them. Not now, not ever. He found a safety unrivalled in their familiarity. The light streaming through the dusty blinds hit a key hanging from a hook on the picture rail, and the man sighed. He thought of the beast they controlled, of the car that once ruled the streets but now stood parked up, listed as SORN, in a lock-up half a mile from his current position.

The man remembered the better days when they'd zoomed through the London streets together, on the inevitable trail of their latest

piece of scum. He remembered the stench of cigarette smoke that had oozed into the fabric of the upholstery but was now fading, and how it had once mingled with the sweetest perfume. _Her_ perfume.

Her.

With a sigh, the man sat up and switched on the lamp, a deathly glow filling the space. As he stared into the void, his mouth barely moving, an almost-silent mumble was uttered.

"I'm sorry, Bolly."

* * *

><p>AN: **Well there's chapter two! :) Again, apologies for the lack of Gene, but FEAR NOT- we get to see a 'lil bit more of the fab Mancunian in the next chapter, and certainly more in those following. Stay tuned to see if Molly is a DI in the making- and many thanks for taking the time to read!

I wouldn't say no to a review, if you had the time
;)

~ElementsOfSapphire.

3. The Dust in His Eyes

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A/N: Hi again! So here's chapter three of 'Project Ashes', and you'll (probably) be pleased to know that a certain DCI becomes a little bit more prominent in this installment! Thank you for reading so far, and I hope that you enjoy the following chapter! :)

* * *

><p>~Project Ashes~

* * *

><p>Chapter Three:

The first thing that struck Molly about Karrie's father's garage was the stench of oil that accompanied it; her nose curled at the encompassing fumes as she followed her friend past the half-built vehicles to a grimy 'office' at the back of the building.

No sooner had they reached the door did a figure push through. Mid-forties and devoid of hair, Derek Smith was of dominating size, filling up almost the entirety of the door frame, and yet his size lost its power through the knitted jumper he wore, and the sweet tune

he hummed. Molly couldn't help but wonder if he'd ever even hurt a fly.

"Alright, love! What yer doing here, then, sweetpea?"

The smile he passed to his daughter lit up his face, swamping him with an inevitably friendly persona. Gesturing to a chair some yards off, he continued to polish the wheel hub in his grip, the tart smell somewhat more appealing to the girl's noses than the overhanging oily aroma.

"It's Pud, dad. She was wondering if you knew anything about finding cars."

"Finding cars? What's she want to do that for? Your mum's got a fine set of wheels there, girl."

Molly smiled politely at Derek, trying to ignore the small pang of jealousy she found igniting from watching the affectionate father/daughter relationship the pair beside her shared. She wondered, very briefly, what it would be like to have a father who was actually there on your birthdays, or first day of school, or turned up for the video call you'd arranged weeks beforeâ€¦.

Karrie looped her arm through the crook of Molly's elbow, wondering whether it was nerves, or the unfamiliar location that had rendered her friend apparently speechless.

"We're looking to find a car as in tracing it, not looking to buy." Molly corrected, passing Derek a small slip of paper with the mysterious plate number scrawled in her mother's hand. "We can tell you that it's on SORN, if that helps?"

Mr Smith consulted the paper for only a brief moment, his warm expression dimming somewhat as he glumly passed the paper back. "Sweetpea, I'm a mechanic, not a detective."

"But what about your connections at the club? Surely one of them must be able to help us?" Karrie inquired, watching Molly's face fall as she reclaimed the slip of paper. Her fingers no longer curled around it like the life-line she had previously seen it as, but now held it limply, as though wishing it would blow away in the wind. Derek seemed to note his daughter's desperation, and Molly's downcast expression, and couldn't hide the pang of sadness that flushed across his face.

"Even if I knew how to help you, I couldn't. Its confidentiality, and it's the rules. I'm sorry, girls."

Slowly he rose from his seat, leaving the disappointed pair behind him. As he tapped the wheel hub in his grasp back onto the closest car, he heard his daughter whisper a solemn, 'sorry' to her friend, and the sadness in his face turned to guilt. Molly and Karrie had been best friends for years, and on the times his wife and himself had fancied a night out, Alex had always stooped in and taken Karrie for the evening, no matter how short the notice. Now, here her daughter was asking for a little help, and there was simply nothing he could do.

Never looking away from his task-in-hand, Derek asked, "How about,

Molls, you join meself and my Karrie 'ere for a spot of early dinner at that new place down the road? Could do with an hour away from all these clutches and bolts."

"Thanks, Mr Smith, but I promised mum I'd be home for three." Molly replied as she got up to leave. Swinging her bag over her shoulder, and shoving the slip unceremoniously into her back pocket, the young girl began to head back across the oily floor towards the exit. Passing Derek, she bequeathed him a sad smile before sending Karrie a small wave. "Bye," she breathed, and was soon out of the door.

"Why's the car so important, Kaz? I've never seen that girl look so downtrodden in her life."

Mr Smith, finished with adjusting the wheel, glanced across at his daughter. It was when their eye's met that Karrie realised, possibly for the first time, just why the car was so important to Molly. Karrie was lucky; she had a loving mother, doting father, two annoying siblings and a cat to go home to every night. Molly? She had her mum. That was it. If she lost her, then her entire life would crumble to rubble entirely; sure, she had Evan, but he was far too old to be looking after her full time. If Molly could find that car, then maybe, just maybe, she could find whatever it was that her mother had lost.

"She thinks it'll save her mum," came the eventual reply.

* * *

><p>The only way Alex could walk down that road, she realised, was if she was to pretend to shield her eyes from the light reflecting from the many windows of the building opposite. Her steps were misleadingly assertive as she walked the length of the street, apologising loosely to those she accidentally bumped into en route. It would be bad enough trying to face the trattoria she had called home for nearly two years, let alone the place she'd worked and thrived in that stood opposite, casting its majestic shadow.<p>

As a corner came into view, Alex turned on her heel, finally chancing an upwards glance. There, in front of her, was a building so familiar she could almost picture it better than her own, current abode. Gone was the red canape and buckets of flowers that she had once grown to love; gone were the noisy lunchtime eaters and busy commuters. Alex realised, with a hard pang to the heart, that the place she'd dined in every evening, the place where her and Gene had sat and laughed and bickered every evening was no longer there, having been converted to a posh, London flat. There was no door to knock on, no owner to ask if they could remember their descendant. It was simply a building, devoid now of the answers she'd so desperately hoped she'd find there.

She didn't bother to look across at the opposing building as she slumped off back to her car once again. She knew that would be the last straw; if her beloved station had fallen to nothing and been transferred to a new location, she knew it would have been the end, that the ever-growing pain in her heart would cripple her once and for all. So putting her best foot forward, she set off, each step adding another stone to the weight on her heart.

Perhaps, however, if she had chanced a glance, she'd have seen the man as he practically fell down the front few stairs. His long, black coat flowing behind him, his bumbling comrades in his wake, the man stumbled, struck dumb by the figure retreating a mere few yards ahead.

Composing himself, and leaving a trio of utterly perplexed coppers behind, the man took long, elegant strides to catch up with the figure, only just withholding himself from breaking out into a run. But as he turned the corner and surveyed the scene before him, he realised they had all but disappeared among the bustling London street.

* * *

><p>Molly pushed the earbuds of her headphones further into her ear as the child, three seats down, continued to cry for their long-confiscated teddy bear. She'd put up with it the first time the bear had been launched at her face, and she'd barely batted an eyelid on the second occasion, but when the little boy raised his arm with the inevitable threat of attack number three, Molly had asked the mother, quite politely, to stop her child from doing so.<p>

It was only because the irritated glances of the other occupants of the bus turned from the child to Molly, that she realised her phone must have been ringing " without her hearing so- for a good thirty seconds or so. Embarrassed, she tugged the headphones from her ear and swiftly answered the call.

"Alright, Squirt?"

Molly couldn't hold back her surprise. "Evan!"

"I haven't heard from you or your mother in weeks- you two both alright? I was beginning to get worried."

It was true. Ever since returning from hospital, Alex had become oddly distant to Evan, their weekly visits simply evaporating to an event of the past. She told her daughter that they talked on the phone whilst she was at school, that he didn't want to swamp her so soon after all that had gone on, but Molly had been hesitant to accept that as the whole truth. She had felt bad not seeing him to begin, considering the fact he'd always been there for her, but then she had become so distracted with cheering up her mother, that she'd pushed the problem to the back of the ever-growing queue.

How was she to know what her mother had found out about him in 1981?

"It's just been chaos ever since mum was discharged from hospital. You know how it is, settling back into a routine and all," she lied, hoping she'd kept the hesitance from her voice. "But I thought mum's been ringing you?"

A silence prevailed, and as suspicion grew in Molly's mind, she returned the glare she was receiving from a man at the front of the bus.

"Haven't heard from her since before, well, you know." Evan answered truthfully. Suddenly questions began to reel in the girl's head; why

were they not talking? Had he tried ringing her mum? Had her mum actually tried ringing him? What had caused this bizarre reluctance between them?

But, right now, that was still the problem to the end of her queue.

She breathed in a cleansing lungful of air, preparing herself for the next question she intended to ask. Glancing around at the several sets of eyes still staring at her, she lowered her voice to ask, "Evanâ€|. Can I ask you something that may seem a little bit peculiar?"

A short laugh greeted her from the other end of the phone. "I raised your mother, Molly, I doubt you can surprise me anymore than she ever did."

"Did youâ€|. Did you ever know a Gene Hunt?"

Suddenly the cheer in Evan's voice had dissipated, and an ominous silence reached Molly's ear. When she lowered her phone, convinced he'd hung up, she was almost surprised to hear the eventual, crackling response.

"How do you know that name?"

* * *

><p>Modern technology had always been a problem to him; too many buttons, too many options and far too many mistakes to so easily be made. Life was better when all a computers had on them was the time, date and a few very basic games. What was wrong with good, old fashioned files, anyway?<p>

Cautiously using the mouse to click on the first option, the man selected the page relating to 'current serving officers', and was pleasantly surprised when the screen immediately responded_. Nancy computer files were definitely quicker to flick through_, it had to be said.

The man could barely suppress his nerves as he clicked on the search bar, his finger practically shaking as the gloved digit carefully began to punch in the letters. When the name was complete, he shot a quick glimpse around the file's room to ensure he was still very much alone, then hit the search with an assertive click.

He'd looked up the name in the old, handwritten files several times in the last twenty-odd years, flashing his ID and scowling at any desk clerk that tried to claim he wasn't 'senior' enough to be allowed access. _Trust me, sonny boy, if you knew how old I was there'd be no argument as to who was and wasn't senior._

He'd never been able to make it past the first few pages; his vision almost always becoming strangely blurred so that he'd have to give up and pass the files back. Probably just his eyes getting tired, he never had been good with case notes and files. It definitely wasn't tears. No, definitely not.

And now, finally, he'd dared to try the current files instead. The mysterious figure he'd seen â€" twice now â€" had haunted him, and

knowing it was silly and pathetic and ridiculous to be hoping, he had to check for his own peace of mind- had to prove to himself that he was simply being ludicrous.

But if he was being ludicrous, however, surely the computer wouldn't have come up with a result, would it?

With sweaty palms and a tentative click, he opened the file and gasped at the result before him.

There, in simple bold letters at the top of the page, was the name that had swamped his mind, consumed his thoughts for longer than he cared to admit.

DI ALEXANDRA DRAKE

Fighting the water distorting his view, the man breezed through the file, certain words and phrases fitting so beautifully with the Alex he had once known that the chance this was simply a coincidence began to melt away.

_Aged 35â€|. Police Psychologist_â€|. _firearm trainedâ€|. One daughterâ€|. Currently off-duty: recovering from a coma induced in the line of dutyâ€|._

It was with the picture he found, as his eyes reached the bottom of the page, that every last ounce of doubt melted away, and was replaced instead with an overriding, searing pain of guilt. The curls were straightened, the heavy make-up non-existent, but he could never confuse those eyes, or cheekbones, or slight smile anywhere. It was definitely, 100%, her.

_2008? Daughter? Coma? _

All her psycho-whatsit and 'home' prattle had been the truth all alongâ€|.

Not knowing entirely sure why, or what he expected to gain from it, he grabbed the pen and paper from his coat pocket and hastily scrawled down the email address sitting innocently in the box regarding 'contact information'.

_Even if she doesn't recognises me, it'll give me a chance to apologise. I owe that to 'er at the very least. _

She doesn't 'ave to accept it, just as long as she knows.

_I'm sorry, Bols. _

I'm so, so sorry.

He hated the file rooms with their lack of windows and dim lighting and mildew stench. The dust always got to his eyes and made them water.

* * *

><p>AN: **Well, there's chapter 3 for you! I hope you enjoyed it, and if you want to find out just what Evan knows, and whether our mysterious (rather guilt-swamped) DCI _does_ send an email, stay

tuned for chapter 4!

Many thanks for reading this so far :)

~ElementsOfSapphire.

4. When Patience Wears Thin

****_DISCLAIMER:** _The following story was written entirely for entertainment purposes. I do not own the rights to _Ashes to Ashes_, the characters, the settings- any of it. All rights and ownership are to Kudos, Monastic and the BBC. I am using them purely on a fan basis; not for money. The story may be taken down instantaneously if it should be desired, and I hope that I have not breached any regulations. I am simply a fangirl who believes this world needs more _Ashes to Ashes _in it! Thank you :)**

A/N: Hello everyone! Thank you for following this story so far- and for your reviews (they make my day!) Just to warn you all, there's a little bit of swearing in this chapter, and Alex is a little insensitive, so please be wary of that as you read. Hope you enjoy! :)

* * *

><p>~Project Ashes~

* * *

><p>Chapter Four:

When Molly all but slammed her front door shut, she was greeted by the unmistakable aroma of slightly-charred toast. Passing the front room on route to the kitchen she glimpsed her mother laying fully across the sofa, eyes glossy as she stared through the television with the remote threatening to fall from her grasp.

Once in the kitchen, her eyes fell upon the plate of heavily-burnt toast, topped with what appeared to be stone-cold beans.

"That for me?" she called, picking up the plate to surreptitiously decanter a fair portion into the bin. When the muffled agreement sounded, she poured herself a glass of milk from the fridge and wandered to the lounge with glass and plate to hand. "Thanks." She smiled warmly, but was met with frosty indifference.

"You were supposed to be back by three."

Molly frowned up at the clock above the television, shooting a confused sideways glance to her mother. "It's ten past, mum."

A pout and a brief nod was all Molly got in return, and she wondered what event had occurred during the past few hours to dishearten her mother in such a way. They'd started the day so optimistically, so happily, and now she appeared to have returned to her crestfallen self. Understanding that her mother wasn't going to prompt conversation anytime soon, Molly decided it best to get the truth, out.

"I was talking to Evan." She said quietly. She rested her knife and fork to the side of her barely-touched 'dinner' as she awaited the expected retort, but the only action Alex took was to lift the remote ever-so-slightly, and switch channels.

"Why are you ignoring him?"

"I'm not." The remote control was thrown to the coffee table, landing unceremoniously with a rather loud impact. "I just keep missing his calls."

Molly's snort could but imply her obviously disdain.

"Twenty calls; that's almost impressive."

Alex shrugged and finally lifted her eyes to meet those of her daughter's momentarily before tearing them nonchalantly away and back to the monotonous documentary flickering away.

Maybe visiting Luigi's didn't go quite as she'd hoped.

Maybe she already knowsâ€¦.

Molly placed her plate on the arm rest of the settee as she leant forward nearer to the shell of her mother. At the closer proximity she could see the swirl of emotions struggling behind the stormy irises, covered by a thin veil of distant heartbreak. It was then that she realised that the optimism she'd steadily helped to build over the previous couple of days had been all but washed away.

With more confidence than she felt, Molly breathed, "He would have been around here in the 80's. Why haven't you spoken to him about anything?"

"He doesn't need to be involved with this investigation."

Molly watched as her mother simply stretched forward, took the controller back in hand and set about changing channels once again. This was worse than it had been previously, this was far more distant, far more estranged. It was as though her mother had finally found someone to blame for her inner turmoil. Molly just wished she hadn't been the target.

"With our investigation or with our lives."

Alex snorted, immediately swapping channels once more as a too-cheery voice radiated from the television. "_My_ life, Molly." She corrected coldly, accompanied by another _click_ from the remote. "Clearly he's still involved with yours."

Did her mother want her to just cut Evan out after everything he'd done for them over the years? On her birthday, on the most traumatic day of her life, Evan hadn't even batted an eyelid when her mother had phoned him to look after her, mere minutes after watching a madman take her daughter kidnap. He didn't question why she hadn't told her superiors to lump it and care for her child herself. He _never_ questioned her mother's motives, so why was she being so unreasonably cruel now?

"He's basically been my dad; I'm not going to ignore him when you

don't even give me a valid reason as to why."

Molly rose from her seat, completely giving up with her excuse of a dinner, and wandered back to the door of the front room. In the frame she paused, and turned slowly back to face her mother. "And he was quite helpful, actually."

"Oh, I bet he was," came the sneered reply.

The warmth of Evan's voice on the phone ricocheted back to Molly's memory as the acid bluntness of her mother's sliced through. Weeks of pain and loneliness sprung to the front of her mind, overriding any sympathy she had managed to muster in the past towards the woman being so cruel to her now. The turmoil and responsibilities had become too much, and finally something snapped in the innocent girl's brain.

"What is your problem, mum!?"

Perhaps fire hadn't been the best way to relieve the tension.

Alex's head snapped up, her eyes bright with indignation and despise, glistening with something so close to hatred that Molly had to bite her lip to stop the tears of surprise and betrayal slipping down her face. "Do you want to know what my problem is?" her mother snapped, sitting up abruptly to stare her daughter straight in the eye, "My problem is that I trusted you enough to share my secret with you, to let you help me as you have done. I thought we were working well together, I thought we were actually going somewhere. And yet here you are, going behind my back and discussing the case with practically anybody! I have been through so much, and I have been trying so hard to adjust back into this life, and do you know why? Because of you, Molly. Yes- you! All the time I was 'there', my only aim was to get back to you, that's all I ever bloody went on about, and now look at me! Look at us, for crying out loud! I've got shit all here. Shit all."

The tears on her mother's face were all too real as she snuffled and rubbed her eyes furiously, trying her hardest to keep her emotions in check. Molly looked on, almost confused as to why she could only feel anger and why the rush of sympathy she knew she ought to be feeling, hadn't come.

"'Working well together'? 'The case'? You're supposed to be my mother, not DI Drake at home. I'm just trying help you, mum!"

Alex began rubbing her eyes once again, acting oblivious to her daughter's evident aggravation as she turned away to slump back into the sofa. "Well maybe I don't need your help on this one." She mumbled, only turning her eyes to look at her daughter to add, "You're just a kid."

Molly let her words sink in; felt as they sunk through her body like burning honey, scarring when they should be soothing. A Kid, she'd said. A kid. Does a kid have to look after their mother when they're too ill to? Does a kid make the dinner for weeks on end, or do the ironing, or wash the clothes, without a mutter of complaint? Does a kid have to listen to their mother's preference for another life, where they weren't involved, and be expected to act sympathetically towards it? Does a kid spend their every hour they

have spare trying to find their mother's possibly-non-existent romantic interest from another century?

No, a kid did not.

Looking at the woman who had once been her mother, but was now simply a stranger, Molly inhaled deeply, before saying in a cold, level tone,

"Gene Hunt's dead."

* * *

><p>"I'm a bitch, Kaz."<p>

Karrie smiled warmly at her friend as they sat huddled together in her garden den. It was past eight now, and despite it being summer, the girls had retreated under the many blankets the bed in the little room provided, their faces lit only by the few candles they had yet to burn out.

"No, that's your mum, Pud. You've been trying your hardest for her, and one bad day comes along and she slaps it straight back in your face."

"She's been through so much, has a bad day, and suddenly I'm just consumed with hatredâ€|. It's not normal, is it?"

Karrie thrust the packet of marshmallows into Molly's arms, passing over their bowl of melted chocolate and nodding her head towards it. Molly curled her nose, but plonked one of the gelatine blobs into the mixture regardless, and ate it with a hint of a smile.

"It is when you've been lumbered to help her all by yourself," Karrie replied, throwing her arm around Molly for a brief, supportive hug, "but we can get through this together, ok? Tomorrow, we're going back to yours to sort this once and for all. But for now--"

"Mm?" Molly mumbled quietly, not being able to hold back her smile that dwindled from her friend's kindness. This is what she had been needing, and she knew it.

Karrie jabbed the laptop sitting on Molly's lap, smudging it slightly with a chocolatey finger-print. "We're going to ring _that _number."

That number, as Karrie stated, had been proudly found by herself and Molly. On looking through the files Molly had copied across from her mother's laptop, they'd finally managed to match a name with a number they'd found on some (rather dodgy-looking) website. It was their first lead to a living, breathing descendant of Alex's 80s world. If this number existed, then they could begin to unravel the mystery as to how Alex has become so intrinsically enveloped with the time.

"Isn't it too late?" Molly asked, cautiously, but Karrie simply handed her the ringing phone.

"Just do it, Pud."

"Hello?"

The voice was frail, tinged with a northern accent and by no-means smooth. It was anxious, confused, and didn't help to rid Molly of her own anxieties.

"Oh, er- hello. I'm Molly, Molly Drake."

She heard the nervous draw of breath.

"It's a bit late for cold-calling, dear. G'night-"

"No! Please! I'm not a cold-caller. I was ringing to ask if you have ever known of an Alex Drake? You are Jackie Queen, yes?"

A silence prevailed, and Molly wondered briefly if this conversation was going to travel in the same direction her previous one with Evan had gone.

However, the voice, when it came, had turned suddenly warmer.

"Who's asking?"

"I'm her granddaughter- Molly Drake."

Jackie chortled down the line, and Karrie raised her eyebrows in hope to Molly, who reciprocated the gesture. "So she did have a daughter after all! Well I never!"

"You know her then?"

"Knew her a bit, aye. She let me stay on her couch once." A snort of laughter rang down the line, "Strange woman."

Molly and Karrie shared a nod of agreement before the former continued with their inquiry.

"I'm- I'm just trying to trace her history for my mum; she's so busy nowadays. Do you happen to know what happened to her?"

"I shouldn't-" Jackie began, exhaling deeply as though internally debating something with herself. After a brief moment, she cleared her throat, and Karrie bequeathed Molly with an encouraging smile. "It's old news now, ain't itâ€|. You know of her DCI at the time, Gene Hunt?"

"He seems to have disappeared, too." Molly replied, quietly.

"Well, I'm very sorry, sweetheart, but, well, he shot her. Complete accident, mind. He would never have hurt her. I knew 'im for years and I'd never seen 'im fall for someone so deep in me life. He'd never admit it, mindâ€|. _Anyway_, poor bugger couldn't handle it- killed 'imself not two months later."

The trio let the enormity of the truth sink in, Molly grasping Karrie's hand as they waited for their kindly Glaswegian to continue.

"Of course, they didn't want that leaking into the tabloids. They're not too keen on major police accidents slipping into the press- so we

were all paid to keep quiet about it. Makes people nervous, you know? We were given some news about a scandal in the West to use as an alternate front page story. Massive cover up, it wasâ€¦. But if you want any pictures, I've got one on my laptop. I can send it to yer if you like; lovely one of you grandma."

Molly looked nervously down to Karrie's phone, checking that they'd made sure to hit record at the beginning of the conversation. Here they were; a living, breathing chunk of evidence to her mother's distorted belief that she had, indeed, travelled back in time. And now they were being given photographic evidence! Molly was sure she could almost cry for joy. If she could present this to her mother, perhaps she'd forgive her for her previous coldness.

"So it was all just covered up? Was there even a funeral for them?"

"I tell yer what, I'll give you the address of a Mr Luigi. He was landlord to your mother at the time- ended up renting that flat to my niece when she went down south for university. You can ask him, he'll know more about what went on with all that. I was pregnant, you see, was too busy looking after me bairn to follow up their stories."

Karrie squeezed their laced fingers tightly, bestowing her friend with a massive smile.

"Anything you can send, it'll all be wonderful." A lone tear of sincere hope ran down Molly's cheek. "I- I can't thank you enough."

"I had a lot of respect for your grandmother. Wonderful woman she was, taken far, far too youngâ€¦ but, I should add, be gentle with Luigi, love, he's in a care home now. Look, I should be heading to bed, but it was lovely to here from yer, love; text me yer email and I'll send over that stuff. I'm glad Alex's legend lives on. You'll do her credit."

"Thank you," Molly breathed, barely able to contain the swash of emotions swirling within her, "Goodnight, Miss Queen."

As she killed the call, Molly and Karrie could but stare at each other in joy.

They finally had a fitting corner piece for their _Project Ashes _puzzle.

* * *

><p>Alex lay on the sofa, her face blackened by run mascara and puffy from her hours of tears. Her phone had pinged some time earlier with a message that read,<p>

Molly told me not 2 txt u but feel I shld. Shes my house 2nite. Karrie.

But she had not responded to it.

She felt dirty. Disgusting. A miserable excuse of a failure. Something to insult the human race.

She had no idea why she'd let herself become so consumed once again by her search for Gene. As quickly as she'd found and reconnected with her daughter again, she'd lost her. Her mother, the one who was supposed to love and cherish and care for her, had looked Molly in the eye and basically implied she was worth shit to her. Alex shuddered in self-hatred, and hit the closest cushion as a wave of mourning crashed through her. She punched the cushion again and again, each of her cries becoming more desperate, more hating, with every pound of her fist. The remote was launched and hit a photo of Evan, smashing it to smithereens as the glass rained onto the wooden floor. It was soon followed by the cushion, and another, and eventually her wine glass, until the anger had dissipated, and Alex was left to cry into the bare leather upholstery, exhausted and pained.

It was after some time that her sniffles ran dry, and she turned her head slightly to convey the mess before her. But instead, her eyes were drawn to the blinking light on her phone, which she slowly reached for with curiosity.

You have 1 unread email read the notification on the device, and when she clicked onto her email folder, a bizarre rush of anxiety slashed through her as she read the sender's address.

nigelperkins .uk

She'd never heard of it in her life.

Very gradually she clicked to open the message, her frown of confusion only deepening when it had been read. A simple set of three words, so innocent, so small, but enough to send an unreasonable rush of anticipation coursing through her bones.

It could have been sent on accident, it may not have even been intended for her, but with their short email, the stranger had ignited the same spark Molly had watched dwindle so steadily away. And so with a confident jab of her finger, Alex saved the email.

That email that had read, quite simply,

I miss you.

* * *

><p>AN: **Thank you for reading Chapter Four! Sorry for the lack of our favourite fictional DCI, but he *WILL* be making a return in the next chapter!

I hope you all enjoyed it, and if you can review, that's be fabulous!

~ElementsOfSapphire :)

End
file.